

REQUEST FOR INITIAL PROPOSALS (RFIP)
February 2003
National Smart Growth Certification Program (NSGCP-03)

OVERVIEW

EPA's Development, Community and Environment Division is soliciting proposals from organizations to conduct activities that will lead to the development and implementation of a nation-wide system of third party certification of development projects based on smart growth criteria.

As the multiple benefits of smart growth become clear, demand for this form of development has risen. Increasingly, a variety of entities in the development industry are using the term smart growth to describe and market projects to customers and local regulators. The designs of projects being described as smart growth differ widely and reflect the principles of smart growth to varying degrees. As such, they vary in their ability to achieve the smart growth goals of serving the economy, community, public health and the environment.

A third-party certification system for smart growth development would define criteria for smart growth and allow developers to voluntarily meet these criteria in order to receive certification as a smart growth project. Such a system would help ensure that communities and consumers who want smart growth get what they are looking for. EPA believes that smart growth certification systems can help achieve the smart growth goals communities set for themselves and at the same time improve the environment.

A successful smart growth certification system will need to be embraced by both the development industry and smart growth advocates. Numerous models exist for certification programs. Their success depends on the business community finding value in certification and the consumer respecting the certification process. One model for this new system may be green-building certification programs. Green-building programs exist in many parts of the country. There are national and internationally recognized programs that rate buildings along a variety of green-building criteria. Another model may be regional smart growth rating systems that have been devised by state and local governments as well as non-profit organizations. Examples of these programs include the State of Maryland's Office of Smart Growth Scorecard; Austin, Texas' Smart Growth Matrix and the Metropolitan Washington DC Smart Growth Alliance Recognition Program. Whatever model is used to develop the rating system, it is important that the applicant demonstrates the ability to develop and execute the program in an effective manner.

BACKGROUND

U.S. EPA's Development, Community and Environment Division (Office of Policy, Economics and Innovation) focuses on smart growth issues of regional and national significance. Smart growth development practices support national environmental goals by protecting sensitive habitats and watersheds, minimizing water quality impacts from development, reducing air emissions by increasing transportation choices and reducing heat island effects, and encouraging cleanup and sustainable redevelopment of Brownfields.

Smart growth is development that serves the environment, the community, public health and the economy. Smart growth is often characterized by a common set of development principles:

1. Mix land uses
2. Take advantage of compact building design
3. Create a range of housing opportunities and choices
4. Create walkable neighborhoods
5. Foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place

6. Preserve open space, farmland, natural beauty, and critical environmental areas
7. Strengthen and direct development towards existing communities
8. Provide a variety of transportation choices
9. Make development decisions predictable, fair and cost-effective
10. Encourage community and stakeholder collaboration in development decisions

WHO IS ELIGIBLE

Eligible applicants include (1) incorporated nonprofit (or not for profit) private agencies, institutions, and organizations incorporated or domiciled in the United States, and (2) public (state, county, regional or local) agencies, institutions and organizations. Applicants must be located in, and project activities must be conducted within, the United States, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, or a territory or possession of the United States. Nonprofit organizations described in section 501 (c) (4) of the Internal Revenue Code that engage in lobbying activities as defined in The Lobbying Disclosure Act of 1995 are not eligible to apply. For profit organizations are not eligible to apply.

ACTIVITIES ELIGIBLE FOR FUNDING

Only activities related to the development, implementation and maintenance of a national certification program for smart growth communities are eligible for funding under this RFIP. Specific activities that are eligible for funding under this RFIP include :

- Studies and/or evaluations of existing certification programs
- Workshops, meetings, studies and other activities that will lead to the development of a certification program
- The development and maintenance of databases, spreadsheets or other models to support a program
- Outreach materials and activities necessary for the development and support of a certification program

APPLICATION PROCESS

Proposals must be received by EPA through the mail or by hand delivery (e.g., via courier, UPS, or Federal Express) no later than 5pm East Coast time Friday April 25th, 2003. Applicants must submit an original and 4 copies of their proposal package. Fax and e-mail submissions will not be accepted. Proposals received after the due date will not be considered . Please see the sections on "Proposal Contents" and "Where to Get More Information" for important additional details.

Following selection, applicants will be required to submit a formal request for funding assistance (i.e., federal form SF 424 and associated documentation) and a detailed workplan. These items should not be provided with the initial proposal. Applicants should be aware that there will be a very quick turnaround required if they are asked to submit a formal request for funding assistance (i.e., within four weeks or less after contacted by EPA after the initial selection process).

All applicants should be aware that formal requests for assistance may be subject to intergovernmental review under Executive Order 12372, *Intergovernmental Review of Federal Programs*. Both proposals and formal requests for funding are also subject to the Freedom of Information Act. This means that anyone can request, and receive, copies of them. Applicants should clearly mark information they consider confidential and EPA will make final confidentiality decisions in accordance with agency regulations (40 CFR part 2, subpart B.).

PROPOSAL CONTENTS

Proposals must include a cover letter, summary information page, project description, budget, documentation of qualifications, and, if applicable, documentation of partner participation. Project descriptions should not exceed 10 pages (see below for additional details). The following format is required:

1. Cover letter (does not count against page limit)

The cover letter used to submit your proposal must be signed by an official with the authority to commit your organization to the project and should be written on your organization's official letterhead.

2. Summary Information Page (does not count against page limit)

The summary information page should be one-page long and include the following information:

- the title and number of this Request for Initial Proposals (i.e., National Smart Growth Certification Program, NSGCP-03)
- project title and location
- applicant name, address, telephone and fax numbers, and e-mail address
- name and title of project contact (including how to reach if different from above)
- type of applicant organization (e.g. nonprofit, local government, state government, etc.)
- summary budget information (amount requested from EPA; amount and source of any matching funds)
- 5 to 10 line abstract of proposal

3. Project Description (no longer than 10 page sides)

The project description must provide a concise overview of the project and include a preliminary workplan outlining the project's major tasks, products, and timetable. The narrative must also address how the proposal meets the selection criteria. If the applicant deems that it will take longer than one year for the project to reach the implementation stage, the proposal should describe the entire multi-year project up to three years in length. Significant time should be spent describing the first year of work and its products. Since we reserve the right not to fund any future work beyond the first year, the products of each year's work must be complete and separate from the overall project. If other project partners or funding sources are involved, their role and contribution must be defined. In reviewing the project description, reviewers will not consider any pages over the 10 page limit. The project description must be no longer than five pages double sided, or 10 pages single sided, must use no smaller than 10 point type and should have page margins all-around of at least one inch.

4. Budget (does not count against page limit)

The project budget should include personnel, fringe benefits, travel, equipment, supplies, contractual, and other. If not self-evident, entries under each category should be explained in the budget itself or in the project description.

5. Documentation of Qualifications (does not count against page limit)

The applicant must include short bios of all principle staff who will have a major role in the project. Bios must specifically address each individual's experience with smart growth issues. This section must also include a short description of the applicant organization's history of working on smart growth issues as well as documentation of the applicant organization's definition of smart growth.

6. Documentation of Partner Participation (does not count against page limit)

If the applicant is including other organizations as part of the project team, the application must include letters from the partners stating their intention to work on the project. These letters must be on the partner's letterhead and must be signed by a responsible official of the partner organization. These letters must be included in the application package and must not be sent separate from the package.

BUDGET REQUEST AND SCOPE OF ACTIVITIES

EPA expects to have approximately \$50,000 available for proposals under this RFIP for this funding cycle; this is subject to availability of funding within the agency's final FY 03 budget. Applicants are strongly encouraged to submit proposals for first-year activities for approximately \$50,000 or less. Final grants may be negotiated for budget and project periods of up to 3 years, with funding for future years dependent on funding availability, agency priorities and applicant performance. Applicants should provide detailed descriptions of the activities proposed for the first-year under this competition, as well as a description of what follow-up activities would be conducted in subsequent years if additional funding is available. A ceiling of approximately \$300K for three year agreements is suggested. EPA expects to award approximately one to two assistance agreements under this RFIP.

There are no match or cost-sharing requirements. However the degree to which the project budget effectively uses EPA funds and/or leverages matching funds will be considered as an evaluation criterion. Matching funds can include cash or in-kind contributions. Any dollars counted towards a match must be for costs that EPA can fund. Allowable costs for nonprofit organizations are defined in OMB circular A-122; allowable costs for public entities are defined in OMB circular A-87.

SELECTION CRITERIA

A proposal must meet the following threshold criteria to be considered:

Threshold Criterion 1: Smart Growth Focus

The proposal must embody, result in, or encourage smart growth. The proposal must focus on the issues, subjects and activities targeted by this RFIP and explained in the "Overview", "Background" and "Activities Eligible for Funding" sections. The proposal must clearly demonstrate an in-depth understanding of the smart growth issues addressed by the project, and the applicant must clearly demonstrate expertise in smart growth issues. EPA will use the smart growth definition outlined in the "Background" section to apply this criterion.

Threshold Criterion 2: Allowable Activities

The project must consist of activities authorized under one or more of the following EPA grant authorities: Clean Air Act section 103 (b)(3); Clean Water Act section 104 (b) (3); Solid Waste Disposal Act section 8001, as amended; Toxic Substances Control Act section 10; Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act section 20, as supplemented by P.L.106-74; and Safe Drinking Water Act sections 1442 (a) and (c). Most of the statutes authorize grants for research, investigations, experiments, training, demonstrations, surveys and studies. The project activities must advance the state of knowledge or transfer information. The term "demonstrations" can encompass the first instance of the pollution control or prevention technique, or an innovative application of a previously used method. The term "research" may include the application of established practices when they contribute to learning about an environmental concept or problem.

Threshold Criterion 3: Environmental Focus

In order to be funded, the project's general focus must be one that is specified in the statutes listed above. For most of the statutes, a project must address the causes, effects, extent, prevention, reduction, and elimination of air, water, or solid/hazardous waste pollution, or, in the case of grants under the Toxic Substances Control Act or the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide and Rodenticide Act, to "carrying out the purposes of the Act." The overarching focus must be on the statutory purpose of the applicable grant authority, in most cases "to prevent or control pollution." In light of this, proposals relating to topics which are sometimes included within the term "environment" such as recreation, conservation, restoration, or habitat protection should describe the relationship of these topics to the statutorily required purpose of pollution prevention and/or control.

Threshold Criterion 4: Serve a Public Purpose

Projects should be of primary benefit to the applicant organization and the public at large. Proposed projects should clearly and directly support the applicant organization's overall mission and long-term goals.

The threshold criteria will be applied on a pass/fail basis. Proposals which fail any one of the threshold criteria will not be considered further.

Evaluation factors:

If a proposal meets the threshold criteria, it will then be evaluated against the following factors:

1. Potential impact of the project and likelihood of success
2. Degree to which the proposing organization is an appropriate representative for the issue dealt with in

the assistance agreement, is likely to be viewed as an authority on the subject, or is partnering with an organization that meets these requirements.

3. Degree to which the applicant demonstrates expertise and experience in smart growth.
4. Degree to which the project budget effectively uses EPA funds and/or leverages matching funds.
5. Degree to which the results of the project are broadly applicable and encourage widespread, constructive changes to development patterns across the country.
6. Degree to which the project approach or findings are replicable, serve as a learning tool, and will be disseminated to appropriate audiences.

Proposals will be scored high, medium or low against each of the evaluation factors using a numerical scale of 1 through 5. Factors 1 through 3 will be given higher weight than factors 4 through 6.

OTHER FACTORS

EPA will carefully consider the applicant's past performance administering federal financial assistance and carrying out projects supported by EPA and other federal agencies. This may include the results of audits conducted by EPA's Office of Inspector General, other federal agencies, or state, local or tribal oversight entities. Applicants are strongly encouraged to discuss their performance history in their proposals and to provide contacts for EPA to obtain additional information. In making final selections, factors such as overall excellence, geographic diversity, project diversity, and applicant diversity (i.e., type of organization) may also be considered.

Any disputes regarding funding decisions will be resolved in accordance with 40 CFR Part 30 or 31, depending on the applicant. EPA reserves the right to reject all applications and make no awards.

AWARD MECHANISM

This solicitation falls under Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance No. 66.611, Environmental Policy and Innovation Grants, authorized under Delegation of Authority I-47.

EPA expects to use new cooperative agreements to fund approved projects. Cooperative agreements entail substantial federal involvement in the project. Such involvement may include but is not limited to EPA review and approval of project scope and phases; EPA participation in and collaboration on, various phases of the work; EPA review of all draft and final products; regular e-mail, phone, and conference calls; and/or EPA involvement in selection of key recipient personnel.

WHERE AND WHEN TO APPLY

You must submit one original and 4 copies of your full proposal (your full proposal includes the cover letter, summary information page, project description, budget, documentation of qualifications, and documentation of partner participation--if applicable--as described under the section entitled "Proposal Contents"). Please note that the delivery address varies depending on whether you are mailing your proposal or arranging for hand delivery.

If you are sending your proposal via hand delivery (e.g., Federal Express, Courier, UPS), send it to:

Deloris Swann
Development, Community and Environment Division
Office of Policy, Economics, and Innovation
U. S. Environmental Protection Agency
1301 Constitution Avenue N.W.
EPA West, Room 1408 C
Washington, D.C. 20004

If you are mailing your proposal, send it to:

Deloris Swann
Development, Community and Environment Division
Office of Policy, Economics, and Innovation
U. S. Environmental Protection Agency
mail code 1808T
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue N.W.
Washington, DC 20004

Please also note that there may be substantial delays in mail service to EPA, due to heightened security requirements. Proposals must be received by EPA by 5pm east coast time Friday April 25th, 2003. No late proposals will be accepted. No fax or e-mail submissions will be accepted. Postmarks or meters will not be considered sufficient documentation of on-time delivery.

WHERE TO GET MORE INFORMATION

Applicants with questions about this solicitation should contact:

Brett Van Akkeren
US EPA Development, Community and Environment Division
Phone: 202-566-2865
e mail: vanakkeren.brett@epa.gov

Answers to frequently asked questions will be posted on the EPA web site at www.epa.gov/smartgrowth. The only pre-application assistance available under this competition will be related to clarifying the requirements of the RFIP.

AWARD ANNOUNCEMENTS

Recipients will be notified of who received an award through a posting of award recipients on the EPA smart growth website (www.epa.gov/smartgrowth). This information will be posted 30 days after EPA's Grants Administration Division issues a written offer of award to each recipient. Awards are expected to be made sometime in the Fall of 2003.

Finalized 2/19/03